



File Code: 2720
Date: September 2, 2020

To Whom it may concern,

The Sandia Ranger District of the Cibola National Forest (CNF) is considering a proposal from Sandia Peak Ski Area (Sandia Peak) to construct a mountain coaster on National Forest System (NFS) lands within their SUP area. The proposed project was identified in Sandia Peak's accepted 2016 Master Development Plan and would be located entirely within Sandia Peak's existing SUP area. Sandia Peak has completed initial planning of the proposed action, which is depicted in the **project figure (available on the project webpage)**. This notification has been prepared to introduce the project in more detail and to allow the public early engagement in the project prior to the start of the National Environmental Policy Act process. This information is also available on the project webpage: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56985>. Alternatively, to review the project proposal in an interactive viewer, please visit <https://arcgis.com/1mLXfi>.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed mountain coaster is to increase the variety of multi-season recreation opportunities available at Sandia Peak to accommodate a more diverse range of visitors. Existing multi-season recreation opportunities at Sandia Peak currently consist of scenic tramway and chairlift rides, mountain biking, hiking, and dining opportunities. There is a need for the proposed coaster because while active forms of recreation such as mountain biking and hiking are sought after by many visitors, others enjoy more passive recreation experiences that do not require a specific skillset or physical fitness. The proposed mountain coaster would meet this need, providing a unique and enjoyable multi-season recreational opportunity that would allow a broader spectrum of guests to experience the CNF.

Proposed Action

Sandia Peak proposes to construct a mountain coaster within their SUP boundary. The proposed mountain coaster would both begin and end near the top terminal of Sandia Peak's Chairlift #2 and the top terminal of the Sandia Peak Tramway. The mountain coaster would be gravity powered with cars similar to bobsleds attached to tracks on the hillside. Guests would initially descend approximately 400 vertical feet over approximately 3,000 linear feet of track in a series of s-shaped turns. The ride would end with an ascent back to the starting point on a cable ropeway powered return track measuring approximately 1,400 feet long. The proposed mountain coaster would cross existing ski and mountain biking trails managed by Sandia Peak. The existing *Rob's Run* ski trail and portions of the existing *Fred's Run* and *Inhibition* ski trails would be closed to avoid conflicts between users of the existing and proposed infrastructure. In addition, four or five switchbacks on the existing *Golden Eagle* mountain biking trail would be rerouted to accommodate the proposed mountain coaster. Sandia Peak staff and Forest Service specialists would work together to ensure that user experiences are not impacted on existing trails as a result of the proposed action. No NFS-managed trails would be crossed by, closed, or rerouted for the proposed mountain coaster.



A terminal building would be constructed at the top of the proposed mountain coaster that would be used for mountain coaster operations and for storage and maintenance. In addition, a yurt-like structure would be constructed adjacent to terminal building to serve limited food and beverage options to guests riding the mountain coaster.

The mountain coaster, terminal building, and yurt-like structure would be designed to blend in with the existing infrastructure at Sandia Peak, such as chairlift towers and terminals, lodges, and other ancillary structures, in accordance with the Forest Service Built Environment Image Guide.

Anticipated Analysis

Due to the minimal amount of new disturbance associated with the proposed action, the CNF is considering categorically excluding this project from analysis in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS). The CNF will identify the degree of the potential effect of the proposed action on resource conditions outlined in 36 CFR § 220.6 to determine whether extraordinary circumstances exist. Should the CNF identify a cause-effect relationship between the proposed action and the potential effect on these resource conditions, then extraordinary circumstances exist, warranting further analysis and documentation in an EA. Conversely, if the CNF determines that there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action and that the proposed action qualifies under a Forest Service category of action for categorical exclusion, then an EA would not be prepared. If the CNF is uncertain whether extraordinary circumstances exist, then an EA would be prepared.

Public Involvement

If the CNF determines that the proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an EA or and EIS, this will be your opportunity to comment. If an EA is prepared for the proposed action, the public would be invited to comment on the project during a 30-day public comment period following the release of a draft EA.

Comments will be accepted at any time. However, those posted after the close of a designated comment period may not be able to be given full consideration. Comments received by March 30, 2021 will be most helpful in assisting the CNF during this scoping process.

Electronic comments may be submitted using the online comment form <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=56985> on the project website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56985>

Written comments may be submitted by mail to: Crystal Powell, District Ranger, Sandia Ranger District, Cibola National Forest, Attn. Bryan West, 11776 Highway 337, Tijeras, New Mexico 87059.

To request further information, please feel free to contact the project leader, Bryan West, at bryan.west@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matthew Rau".

MATTHEW RAU
Acting Forest Supervisor

cc: Crystal Powell, Elke Schuster, Bryan West